

Recruitment and Retention Study Series



Sworn Police Personnel

April 2003

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Commission

North Carolina Governor's Crime Commission

Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures.....	ii
Executive Summary.....	iii
Introduction/Study Rationale.....	1
Topics of Discussion.....	1
Recruitment & Retention Objectives.....	1
Plan of Action.....	2
Methods.....	3
Survey Instrument.....	3
Survey Sample.....	3
Results.....	4
Recruitment Issues.....	4
Attrition and Retention Issues.....	10
Agency Educational Requirements & Entry-Level Salaries.....	18
Research Questions.....	20
Discussion and Policy Implications/Recommendations.....	22
Recommendation # 1.....	22
Recommendation # 2.....	23
Recommendation # 3.....	23
Recommendation # 4.....	24

List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1 Perceived Strength of Agency Recruitment Strategy.....	4
Figure 2 Barriers to Effectively Recruiting the Best Possible Candidates.....	9
Figure 3 Barriers to Effectively Recruiting the Best Possible Candidates.....	10
Figure 4 Turnover and Vacancy Rates Over the Past Three Years.....	11
Figure 5 Entry Level Educational Requirement.....	18
Figure 6 Percent of Agencies Requiring a College Degree for Advancement.....	19
Table 1 Recruitment Techniques and their Perceived Effectiveness.....	5
Table 2 Retention Techniques and their Perceived Effectiveness.....	12
Table 3 Causal Factors for Police Department Attrition Rates.....	13
Table 4 Police Department Attrition Rates – Lateral Transfers.....	14

Executive Summary

The Governor's Crime Commission, in conjunction with the North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission and the North Carolina Sheriffs' Education and Training Standards Commission, held a joint planning retreat in the early summer of 2000 to identify and address the major emerging issues facing the state's criminal justice system and its public safety personnel.

Based on the planning group's recommended plan of action a research study team was assembled which consisted of staff members from the three criminal justice commissions. The study team held several meetings and decided that the most appropriate course of action would be to conduct several smaller studies with each targeting the unique attributes and distinct features associated with recruiting and retaining sworn police personnel, sworn sheriff's office personnel, detention officers and public safety telecommunications officials. Thus, this report is one of four, in a series, which examine the issue of recruitment and retention among North Carolina's public safety agencies.

A three part, 27 item survey was developed by the study team and was administered to a stratified sample of 205 state and local police agencies. A 60 percent return rate was achieved.

Respondents were queried on the strength of their departments' recruitment techniques with an almost identical and equal distribution of 35.2 percent of the agencies having a passive recruitment strategy, 33.6 percent describing their strategy as neutral and the remaining 31.2 percent reporting an aggressive strategy.

The most frequently employed recruitment technique was word of mouth (N=118) with 95 percent of the respondents indicating that this was the preferred method which their respective agencies used to recruit potential officers. The second most common recruitment technique was newspaper advertising (N=103, 83.1 %), followed by recruiting through the local community colleges (N=89, 71.8%) and use of the Internet (N=78, 62.9%). Rating these techniques on a scale from zero to nine revealed that the top three most effective techniques were word of mouth (X=6.83), local community colleges (X=5.62) and newspaper advertising (X=5.38). Job fairs, the Police Corps program and radio/television advertising were perceived to be the least effective techniques suggesting that the most effective techniques are also the most frequently used.

The majority of the police agencies, which were represented in the sample of returned questionnaires, did not have a current waiting list or backlog of qualified applicants (67.5%) while the remaining 32.5 percent did note that they currently maintain a waiting list. Of those agencies which do possess a waiting list the number of qualified applicants on those agency lists ranged from two to 36 applicants with the average waiting list containing seven applicants.

The number of applicants, per sworn position, demonstrated a greater degree of variance and ranged from one applicant for each vacant sworn position to 150 applicants per sworn position. The average number of applicants per sworn position, within those police departments represented in the survey, was 9.9.

As part of the survey police personnel were asked to comment, or offer specific recommendations, on what policies, standards and programs should be implemented in order to improve the quality of future applicant pools. Advice on how to recruit more highly qualified police officers was clustered in three primary areas – salaries, improving screening criteria and raising, or establishing new, minimum standards for applicants.

The research team identified ten possible obstacles, or barriers, to recruiting more qualified applicants with the survey respondents being asked to list all which have negatively impacted upon local recruitment in their respective agencies. The most common barriers were competition with other criminal justice agencies (80.6%), agency budget restrictions (72.6%), agency size (37.9%) and competing with the private sector (34.7%).

The percentage of applicants who are hired prior to BLET completion ranged from zero to 100 percent with 70 (58.3 %) agencies requiring all applicants to complete BLET before they are employed. Responses from eight agencies (6.7%) indicate that 100 percent of their new hires are employed first with admittance into a BLET program occurring thereafter. Across the entire study sample the average police department hires 82 percent of its applicants from an applicant pool that has already completed a BLET program with the remaining 18 percent of the new hires being employed prior to BLET.

Turnover rates for sworn police positions, using July 2001 as a base, ranged from zero to 87 percent with an average turnover rate of 14.2 percent being reported for those agencies returning completed surveys. Forty-one percent of the respondents noted that their agency's turnover rate has remained stable for the past three years. Slightly more than a quarter of the agencies experienced either a significant, or slight, rise in their respective turnover rates while turnover rates dropped for 30.2 percent of the police departments.

Respondents were offered a list of six different techniques for personnel retention and were asked to specify each technique which is used by their agencies and to rank each in terms of their effectiveness on a scale from zero, not effective, to nine, highly effective. The most popular retention strategy was annual pay increases, irrespective of job performance, i.e. longevity and cost of living adjustments (81.5%). Offering educational incentives, such as tuition reimbursement and allowing officers to attend classes during work hours, was the second most frequently employed technique (76.6%) followed by personnel promotions (69.4%).

As a general rule the most frequently used retention techniques were also perceived to be the most effective with the exception of promotions and assigning favorable work shifts which were perceived to be less effective than performance based merit pay.

Agency budget restrictions were reported as the most frequently discussed factor when explaining why police officers leave the department. A high percentage of the respondents also noted that lateral transfers to other law enforcement agencies and individuals resigning to accept employment in the private sector were substantial factors which impact upon their respective agency attrition rates.

Respondents were asked to identify the extent to which each factor impacts their agency's attrition, i.e. to select the best response from a range of percentages. Nearly half of the respondents (44%) noted that agency budget restrictions accounted for 71-100 percent of their agency's total attrition rate. Nearly one-third noted that lateral transfers explained between 81-100 percent of their attrition. Surprisingly, all of the remaining factors were discounted as significant contributors with the majority of the respondents noting that these factors account for less than 10 percent of their agency's total attrition. In other words, agency budget restrictions and lateral transfers account for the bulk of police departments' attrition rates. While the remaining factors do explain some attrition, or occur in a large number of the departments, they do not occur frequently enough to drive a sizeable decline in a police agency's workforce.

Nearly 80 percent, of the responding agencies, lost officers to larger law enforcement departments, suggesting that higher salaries and more competitive benefits may explain these losses. Lateral transfers to state law enforcement agencies was the second highest reported type of lateral transfer (61.3%) followed by employment with similar size departments (52.4%). Over forty percent of the agencies lost personnel to smaller law enforcement agencies suggesting that many officers possibly eschew higher salaries, or receive the same salary, yet obtain a mid to senior level police executive position, i.e. sacrifice pay increases for the prestige of being a high ranking command officer in a smaller jurisdiction.

Survey data suggest that no one single type of lateral transfer can account for the majority of all lateral transfers occurring within a police agency. In other words, while more agencies report losing officers to state and larger law enforcement agencies they are not losing the majority of their lateral transfers to these types of agencies with transfers to same size and smaller agencies occurring at about the same rate.

Overall, irrespective of the reasons why officers leave, the average length of an officer's employment is 34 months before he/she decides to leave the police agency. Eighty-four percent of the agencies reported an average length of stay less than three years. Thus, it appears that a critical period of two years and ten months, to three years, exists in which police agencies can implement policies and/or programs to improve retention rates and conversely minimize its attrition rate by retaining officers beyond a three-year period.

The final section of the questionnaire included items on agency entry level educational requirements and starting salary; as well as questions regarding the number of police officers who hold a college degree and the relationship between possessing this degree and career advancement.

Sixty-nine percent of the agencies reported that a high school degree was the minimum educational requirement for entry into sworn police positions with an additional 24 agencies (20.2%) requiring some degree of work experience in combination with this degree. Eleven police departments (9.2%) required an associates' degree and only one agency required a college diploma in order for the applicants to be considered for entry level employment.

Entry level salaries varied considerably but tended to cluster between \$21,000 to \$25,000 with 58.7 percent of the respondents identifying this range as being inclusive for their department's starting salary. One-quarter of the agencies reported a starting salary between \$26,000 and \$30,000 with six percent reporting entry level salaries in the \$31,000 to \$35,000 range. Twelve, or 9.9 percent, reported an entry-level salary of less than \$20,000.

A series of policy relevant research questions were examined, using the survey data, in an effort to further delineate recruitment and retention issues among the state's police departments. Answers to these questions, actual quantitative survey data and the respondents' qualitative suggestions for improving recruitment and retention were compiled and analyzed to produce a series of four policy implications and recommendations. These included launching more aggressive recruitment efforts and exploring new and innovative recruitment techniques, exploring options for retaining officers beyond three years, examining current BLET screening procedures and conducting more research in the area of lateral transfers.

Introduction/Study Rationale

The Governor's Crime Commission, in conjunction with the North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission and the North Carolina Sheriffs' Education and Training Standards Commission, held a joint planning retreat in the early summer of 2000 to identify and address the major emerging issues facing the state's criminal justice system and its public safety personnel. As part of this planning endeavor members of the three commissions were divided into four focus group teams – professional development, public policy, funding and recruitment and retention. Each team reviewed the major issues and obstacles in their respective areas, outlined a series of goals and objectives and concluded by formulating a specific plan of action to attain their stated goals. A summary of the work conducted by the recruitment and retention team is provided below with this report being a direct product of the focus team's recommendations.

Topics of Discussion

The recruitment and retention working group identified six major areas of discussion during the joint planning session:

1. Recruitment and retention of law enforcement and correctional personnel.
2. Law enforcement retirement.
3. Establish minimum screening standards for entrance into BLET.
4. Certification versus licensing.
5. State subsidized salary increases linked to professional certificate program.
6. Minimum salary for law enforcement officers.

Recruitment and Retention Objectives

Following the group's discussion of these topic areas, ten concrete objectives were delineated:

1. Develop partnerships with colleges and high schools (early recruitment).
2. Enhance the ability to identify and attract quality applicants.

3. Establish stronger minimum screening standards for BLET.
4. Become more competitive with the private sector.
5. Public recognition through marketing of the criminal justice profession.
6. Conduct a study which examines the recruitment and retention of criminal justice personnel.
7. Become more competitive with the private sector relative to compensation packages, i.e. salary, take-home vehicles, retirement plans and benefits.
8. Adequate resources relative to staffing, equipment and training.
9. Develop work environment competitively relative to overall employee wellness.
10. Review and further develop career opportunities.

Plan of Action

The focus team outlined a specific plan of action in order to effectuate its objectives and better improve the recruitment and retention of criminal justice personnel in North Carolina. This plan consisted of the following key components:

1. Encourage criminal justice administrators to identify key decision-makers in schools for the purpose of developing early recruitment strategies and partnerships.
2. Assemble a recruitment and retention study team consisting of staff from the three commissions.
3. Develop a marketing strategy and disseminate recruitment packets.
4. Provide fiscal resources to support legislatively mandated initiatives.
5. Develop and implement a wellness program for criminal justice employees.
6. Develop and implement a program for upward and lateral mobility at all levels.

Based on the planning group's recommended plan of action a research study team was assembled which consisted of staff members from the three criminal justice commissions. The study team held several meetings and decided that the most appropriate course of action would be to conduct several smaller studies with each targeting the unique attributes and distinct features associated with recruiting and retaining sworn police personnel, sworn sheriff's office personnel, detention officers and public safety telecommunications officials. Thus, this report is one of four, in a series, which examine the issue of recruitment and retention among North Carolina's public safety agencies.

Methods

Survey Instrument

A three part, 27 item survey was developed by the study team with the first section of the questionnaire presenting questions which addressed the issue of recruiting sworn police personnel. The survey items dealt with recruitment strategies and techniques, the number of applicants and the extent to which the responding agency had a backlog or waiting list of potential candidates. Respondents were also given the opportunity to comment on what course(s) of action should be undertaken to improve the recruitment of sworn police officers and to build a more qualified applicant pool.

Part two addressed the issue of attrition and retention and included questions which were designed to detail the responding agency's turnover and vacancy rates and how these have varied over the past three years. Other questions focused on obstacles which hinder successful recruitment, techniques for retaining sworn personnel and reasons why officers leave the agency. Respondents were also given the chance to offer suggestions for improving personnel retention.

The final section of the questionnaire allowed the agencies to note any concerns, comments or suggestions, regarding all recruitment and retention issues, which they felt the three commissions should be made aware of, and included questions on minimum educational requirements for both entry level positions and internal promotions. The responding agencies were also queried to determine what percentage of their respective sworn officers possessed a college degree.

Survey Sample

A list of North Carolina's police agencies was provided by staff of the Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission and was used as the basis for selecting those police departments which would be included in the survey sample. The list was divided into four groups, or quartiles, based upon the median number of sworn personnel.

A proportionate number of agencies, relative to the percent of agencies in each of the four groups, were sampled and selected to receive a copy of the survey in the mail. A total of 205 surveys were distributed with 53 (25.8%) going to agencies with more than 18 sworn officers, 45 (22%) to agencies with nine to 18 sworn officers and 43 (21%) being mailed to agencies with five to eight sworn officers. The remaining 64 surveys (31.2%) were mailed to the state's smallest law enforcement agencies as defined as having fewer than five full-time sworn officers.

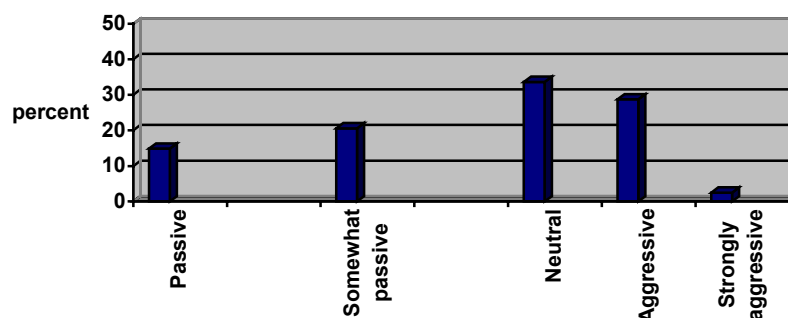
Results

A total of 124 questionnaires were completed by agency personnel producing an aggregate return rate of 60 percent.

Recruitment Issues

Survey participants were asked to describe their respective agencies' recruitment strategies on a continuum which ranged from passive to neutral to strongly aggressive. As Figure 1 reveals the respondents were fairly evenly distributed across the five available response categories with one-third reporting that their agency's recruitment strategy could best be described as neutral. Only 2.5 percent suggested a strongly aggressive recruitment strategy. Combining the five response categories into three produces an almost identical and equal distribution with 35.2 percent of the agencies having a passive recruitment strategy, 33.6 percent describing their strategy as neutral and the remaining 31.2 percent reporting an aggressive strategy.

Figure 1 Perceived Strength of Agency Recruitment Strategy



The most frequently employed recruitment technique was word of mouth (N=118) with 95 percent of the respondents indicating that this was the preferred method which their respective agencies used to recruit potential officers. The second most common recruitment technique was newspaper advertising (N=103, 83.1 %), followed by recruiting through the local community colleges (N=89, 71.8%) and use of the Internet (N=78, 62.9%). Recruitment through the Police Corp program and through radio and television advertising were less frequently used (Refer to Table 1).

Table 1 also depicts the average effectiveness rating for the nine recruitment techniques which were listed in the survey. The top three most effective techniques were word of mouth (X=6.83), local community colleges (X=5.62) and newspaper advertising (X=5.38). Job fairs, the Police Corp program and radio/television advertising were perceived to be the least effective techniques suggesting that the most effective techniques are also the most frequently used. In other words, police agencies use what works the best for finding potential applicants.

Table 1 Recruitment Techniques and their Perceived Effectiveness

Technique	Number Using	% Using	Average Effectiveness Rating (0 to 9)
Word of mouth	118	95.0 %	6.83
Newspaper	103	83.1 %	5.38
Community College	89	71.8 %	5.62
Internet	78	62.9 %	4.64
Personnel listings	76	61.3 %	4.13
Auxiliary/Reserve Force	71	57.3 %	5.32
Job Fairs	61	49.2 %	2.89
Police Corp	44	35.5 %	2.73
Radio/TV	34	25.4 %	.85

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Note: Survey respondents were encouraged to select all recruitment techniques which were utilized by their agencies, thus percentages do not equal 100.

The majority of the police agencies, which were represented in the sample of returned questionnaires, did not have a current waiting list or backlog of qualified applicants (67.5%) while the remaining 32.5 percent did note that they currently maintain a waiting list. Of those agencies which do possess a waiting list the number of qualified applicants, on those agency lists, ranged from two to 36 applicants with the average waiting list containing seven applicants.

The number of applicants, per sworn position, demonstrated a greater degree of variance and ranged from one applicant for each vacant sworn position to 150 applicants per sworn position. The average number of applicants per sworn position, within those police departments represented in the survey, was 9.9.

As part of the survey police personnel were asked to comment, or offer specific recommendations, on what policies, standards and programs should be implemented in order to improve the quality of future applicant pools. Advice on how to recruit more highly qualified police officers was clustered in three primary areas – salaries, improving screening criteria and raising, or establishing new, minimum standards for applicants.

Not surprisingly, the majority of the suggestions dealt with the low and inequitable salary and compensation packages which deter and discourage many excellent candidates from applying for entry-level positions. Frustration at the inability to compete with not only the private sector but also other local and state law enforcement agencies was a common theme among the respondents. Illustrative comments are provided below:

- ▶ Graduated pay scale for 2nd and 3rd year with dept. Higher starting salary for college degree
- ▶ Better pay; better benefits; reduced retirement age
- ▶ More pay - Better retirement benefits. I have lost a lot of professional officers because they were offered more money. Since the economy is down I've had fewer officers to leave.
- ▶ Annual \$31,700 for entry level officers
- ▶ Higher starting pay and pay merit increases
- ▶ Better pay; 20 year retirement

- ▶ A twenty-five year retirement plan to come into line with other states & fed gov't; a competitive pay plan
- ▶ Higher pay for education; pay for education; standard state rated pay; twenty five year state retirement; insurance for retirement after five years
- ▶ Adjust salaries to an equitable level equal to other state LE divisions/agencies

Respondents often commented on the current screening criteria which are used for hiring officers and for selecting BLET candidates. Suggestions were also offered which would either raise existing minimum requirements or establish and implement new recruitment standards. The majority of these dealt with the existing educational standards. Comments included the following:

- ▶ Better screening before BLET
- ▶ Looking into background of potential BLET students both mental and physical before enrolled into BLET
- ▶ Place more restrictions on who may attend BLET at community colleges
- ▶ Disqualify inappropriate persons by background screening prior to BLET - especially psychological
- ▶ Create some sort of test that an applicant must score at least 80% before allowing them to attend BLET. Too many problems with officers that don't have enough education to complete a basic report
- ▶ Require applicant to have at least a two year degree in criminal justice
- ▶ Better background checks before entering BLET
- ▶ Require college degrees in criminal justice or related field
- ▶ BLET students should have a clean criminal history. All applicants should have all their testing done [physical; psychological; drug test] before applying
- ▶ We need to better train officers who conduct backgrounds. Need more training classes for that.
- ▶ Better screening prior to BLET. We have received applicants who completed BLET but were not certifiable due to prior criminal record.
- ▶ Higher physical standards for BLET graduation

- ▶ Basic reading & math testing required for all BLET programs
- ▶ Accept no applicants with any criminal record; raise minimum age requirement
- ▶ Remove entrance standards into BLET program. Community colleges seem to only care about numbers.
- ▶ Mandatory college degree. Tougher background check. Longer probationary period.
- ▶ Raise standards - fitness and academics
- ▶ Raise entry standards into BLET. Do not allow problem employees to keep certification when released from employment. Implement high school programs that will direct HS students toward a LE career. Develop partnerships with two and four year colleges/universities.

Other comments on improving the recruitment process and strengthening the available applicant pool included:

- ▶ Ride along programs to get more experience on the street. Make it part of BLET - to do so many hours with a certified LEO
- ▶ Hiring incentives - Programs to enhance recruitment of women & minorities - Educational incentives
- ▶ Regional training centers. Extend time after BLET graduation to be employed to 18 or 24 months. Regional or statewide applicant pool from community colleges.
- ▶ Better state wide position listings and postings used by ALL LE divisions and departments
- ▶ Better working relationships with military & college programs. More national level advertising.
- ▶ Community College could provide departments with lists of students completing BLET
- ▶ Better recruitment practices in high schools
- ▶ BLET standards raised and all uniformed or a statewide academy with limited campuses - remove it from the community colleges and mirror the patrol's academy

- ▶ Sharing of information/applicants. Suggest an applicant pool by region where once determined qualified- name submitted to a central pool.
- ▶ Selective sponsoring depending on the job market - not overflowing the market with applicants. Very thorough backgrounds by all agencies
- ▶ Remove BLETs from community colleges that are doing a poor job - we need a state agency that runs ALL BLETs in four to six locations with regular professional instruction. Competition between community colleges is reducing the quality of finished product.
- ▶ High School courses i.e. law enforcement operations and standards - educate kids about the high standards required to get into law enforcement

The research team identified ten possible obstacles, or barriers, to recruiting more qualified applicants with the survey respondents being asked to list all which have negatively impacted upon local recruitment in their respective agencies. As Figures 2 and 3 suggest the most common barriers were competition with other criminal justice agencies (80.6%), agency budget restrictions (72.6%), agency size (37.9%) and competing with the private sector (34.7%). A lesser number of agency respondents reported that the current cost of living (25%), applicant criminal histories (21%) and agency location (15.3%) were problematic.

Figure 2 Barriers to Effectively Recruiting the Best Possible Candidates

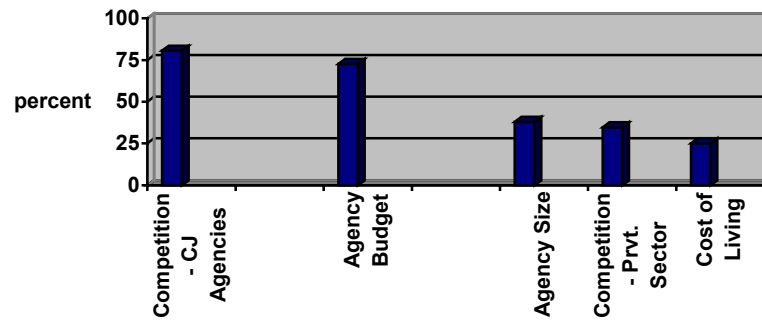
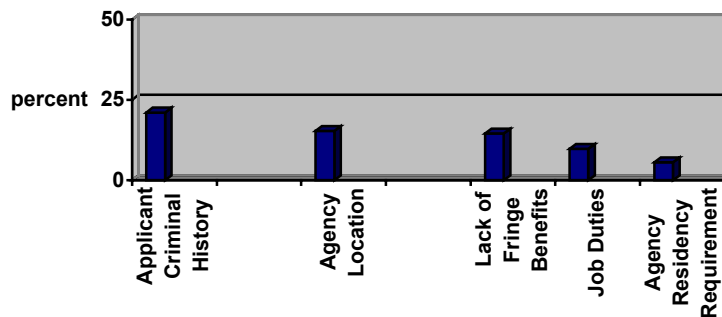


Figure 3 Barriers to Effectively Recruiting the Best Possible Candidates



Other barriers included the lack of equipment or equipment in disrepair, the lack of career advancement opportunities, a general misunderstanding that campus law enforcement officers are fully sworn and vested with the same powers as city police and a negative city reputation.

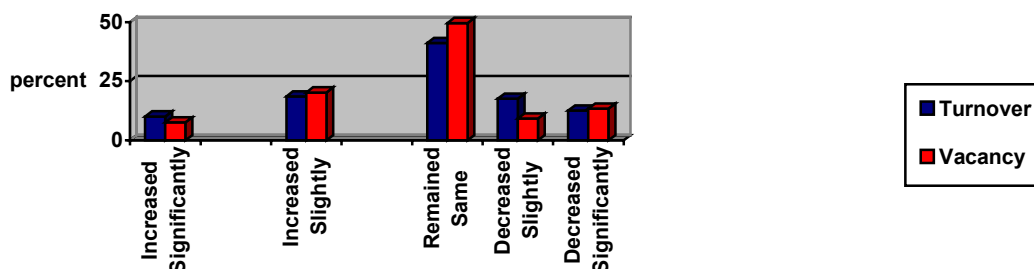
The study team also thought it was important to ascertain the extent to which police agencies hire applicants, who have already completed BLET, versus hiring applicants and then sponsoring their BLET training during the state mandated time period after employment. Survey questions addressed both sides of the coin by soliciting participants to state the percent of both pre and post BLET hires. The percentage of applicants who are hired prior to BLET completion ranged from zero to 100 percent with 70 (58.3 %) agencies requiring all applicants to complete BLET before they are employed.

Responses from eight agencies (6.7%) indicate that 100 percent of their new hires are employed first with admittance into a BLET program occurring thereafter. Across the entire study sample the average police department hires 82 percent of its applicants from an applicant pool that has already completed a BLET program with the remaining 18 percent of the new hires being employed prior to BLET.

Attrition and Retention Issues

Turnover rates for sworn police positions, using July 2001 as a base, ranged from zero to 87 percent with an average turnover rate of 14.2 percent being reported for those agencies returning completed surveys. As Figure 4 documents, 41.2 percent of the respondents noted that their agency's turnover rate has remained stable for the past three years. Slightly more than a quarter of the agencies experienced either a significant, or slight, rise in their respective turnover rates while turnover rates dropped for 30.2 percent of the police departments.

Figure 4 Turnover and Vacancy Rates Over the Past Three Years



Vacancy rates for sworn positions, using June 2002 as a base, ranged from zero to 100 percent with almost half (47.6%) of the agencies reporting a full sworn force with no vacant sworn positions on June 30, 2002. The average vacancy rate for sworn positions was 7.2 percent. As with turnover rates nearly half of the participating agencies (49.6%) reported that their respective vacancy rates had not changed over the past three years. Slightly more than one-fourth (27.8%) reported an increase in their vacancy rates, over the last three years, with 22.6 percent noting a decline during this period.

Respondents were offered a list of six different techniques for personnel retention and were asked to specify each technique which is used by their agencies and to rank each in terms of their effectiveness on a scale from zero, not effective, to nine, highly effective.

As Table 2 reveals the most popular retention strategy was annual pay increases, irrespective of job performance, i.e. longevity and cost of living adjustments (81.5%). Offering educational incentives, such as tuition reimbursement and allowing officers to attend classes during work hours, was the second most frequently employed technique (76.6%) followed by personnel promotions (69.4%).

Survey participant ratings, on the effectiveness of the six retention techniques, are also provided in Table 2. As a general rule the most frequently used retention techniques were also perceived to be the most effective with the exception of promotions and assigning favorable work shifts which were perceived to be less effective than performance based merit pay.

Table 2 Retention Techniques and their Perceived Effectiveness

Technique	Number Using	% Using	Average Effectiveness Rating (0 to 9)
Annual pay increase irrespective of performance	101	81.5%	5.9
Education/training agency expense	95	76.6%	5.6
Promotions	86	69.4%	4.5
Annual pay increase performance based	82	66.1%	5.6
Formal awards, recognition	80	64.5%	4.2
Assigned favorable work shift	75	60.5%	5.2

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Note: Survey respondents were encouraged to select all retention techniques which were utilized by their agencies, thus percentages do not equal 100.

Other retention techniques included:

- ⇒ Take home car
- ⇒ On duty fitness time
- ⇒ Involvement in managerial decisions
- ⇒ Hire long term residents with strong ties to the community
- ⇒ Offer full insurance benefits for entire family at no expense to employee
- ⇒ Provide housing for LE staff

Table 3 Causal Factors for Police Department Attrition Rates

Factor	Number Reporting	Percentage
Agency budget Restrictions	102	82.3%
Transfer to another law enforcement agency	101	81.5%
Left for private sector	87	70.2%
Retirement	71	57.3%
Agency location	62	50.0%
Agency size	59	47.6%
Cost of living	59	47.6%
Specific job duties	55	44.4%

Recruitment and Retention Study Series: Sworn Police Personnel

Unrealistic officer expectations	55	44.4%
Prior criminal history/ Decertification	55	44.4%
Lack of fringe benefits	54	43.5%
Agency residency requirement	51	41.1%

Note: Survey respondents were encouraged to select all attrition factors which affect their agencies, thus percentages do not equal 100.

Table 3 depicts the top three reasons which explain attrition rates within the responding police agencies with agency budget restrictions being reported as the most frequently discussed factor when explaining why police officers leave the department. A high percentage of the respondents also noted that lateral transfers to other law enforcement agencies, and individuals resigning to accept employment in the private sector were substantial factors which impact upon their respective agency attrition rates. It should be noted that all of the factors listed in Table 3 were still identified as reasons for why officers leave, with even the bottom three occurring in slightly more than 40 percent of the responding police agencies.

Respondents were asked to identify the extent to which each factor impacts their agency's attrition, i.e. to select the best response from a range of percentages. Nearly half of the respondents (44%) noted that agency budget restrictions accounted for 71-100 percent of their agency's total attrition rate. Nearly one-third noted that lateral transfers explained between 81-100 percent of their attrition. Surprisingly, all of the remaining factors were discounted as significant contributors with the majority of the respondents noting that these factors account for less than 10 percent of their agency's total attrition. In other words, agency budget restrictions and lateral transfers account for the bulk of police departments' attrition rates. While the remaining factors do explain some attrition, or occur in a large number of the departments, they do not occur frequently enough to drive a sizeable decline in a police agency's workforce.

Further questions were asked in an effort to refine, and explore at a much more detailed level, the extent to which lateral transfers impact police agency attrition. Specifically, to ascertain which types of agencies police officers are leaving for when they are granted a lateral transfer (Refer to Table 4).

Table 4 Police Department Attrition Rates – Lateral Transfers

Recruitment and Retention Study Series: Sworn Police Personnel

Factor	Number Reporting	Percentage
Employment with larger law enforcement agency	99	79.9%
Employment with state law enforcement agency	76	61.3%
Employment with same size agency	65	52.4%
Employment with smaller law enforcement agency	51	41.1%

Note: Survey respondents were encouraged to select all possible lateral transfer types which affect their agencies, thus percentages do not equal 100.

Nearly 80 percent of the responding agencies lost officers to larger law enforcement departments, suggesting that higher salaries and more competitive benefits may explain these losses. Lateral transfers to state law enforcement agencies was the second highest reported type of lateral transfer (61.3%) followed by employment with similar size departments (52.4%). Over 40 percent of the agencies lost personnel to smaller law enforcement agencies suggesting that many officers possibly eschew higher salaries, or receive the same salary, yet obtain a mid to senior level police executive position, i.e. sacrifice pay increases for the prestige of being a high ranking command officer in a smaller jurisdiction.

Slightly more than 40 percent (43.4%) of the responding survey participants stated that lateral transfers to larger agencies accounted for less than 30 percent of their total transfers while more than a quarter (26.2%) noted that these personnel actions explained 81-100 percent of all lateral transfers. Nearly three-fourths (73.7%) of the agencies reported that lateral transfers to state agencies accounted for less than 30 percent of their total transfers. The majority of the respondents noted that transfers to same size, or smaller agencies, only accounted for less than 10 percent of all lateral transfers. Thus the data suggest that no one single type of lateral transfer can account for the majority of all lateral transfers occurring within a police agency. In other words, while more agencies report losing officers to state and larger law enforcement agencies they are not losing the majority of their lateral transfers to these types of agencies with transfers to same size and smaller agencies occurring at about the same rate.

Overall, irrespective of the reasons why officers leave, the average length of an officer's employment is 34 months before he/she decides to leave the police agency. Eighty-four percent of the agencies reported an average length of stay less than three years. Thus, it appears that a critical period of two years and ten months, to three years, exists in which

police agencies can implement policies and/or programs to improve retention rates and conversely minimize its attrition rate by retaining officers beyond a three-year period. Once an officer is retained beyond this critical period attrition drops precipitously. Only 16 percent of the police agencies reported an average length of stay, for those officers that eventually leave the agency, which was greater than three years.

Survey respondents were given the opportunity to freely express ideas for improving police department retention rates. Not surprisingly, the number one recommended method for improving retention revolved around the salary and benefits issue. However, quite a few varied responses were obtained in this area with several innovative ideas being offered as to how police officers can be retained through financial means. Illustrative examples are provided below:

- Better pay for LEO - Better equipment to work with - getting grant money
- A regulated pay rate set throughout the state so that there is no question as to what an officer's pay should be.
- State and federal program to set minimum salary and assist small agencies with funds to match
- Higher standards equals higher pay
- Starting pay higher
- Bring pay to a competitive level - Set up an evaluation system to allow financial advancement - spend necessary monies to get better health insurance
- Comparable salaries within the state per size of the departments.
- State funded % when officers receive an intermediate or advanced certificate
- Pay overtime or give comp by hiring more officers
- Implement a career ladder that includes an increase in salary
- Smaller departments need pay supplemented by state to have a standardized starting pay. A college tuition program provided by state [small depts. can't afford to do this]

- Implement merit pay
- Standard salary grades for entry level officers; educational incentives; reduce retirement [under 30 years]
- Standardize pay by region
- Shift differential pay
- State mandated pay; twenty five year retirement; flat rate longevity pay; Insurance upon retirement after employment of five years; small supplement for active auxiliary officers.
- State wide uniform pay scale based on performance
- Make agency pay rates equitable with other state LE agencies

Survey participants were also encouraged to provide comments on any aspect of the recruitment and retention process that they thought would be of noteworthy importance to the training and standards commissions and the Governor's Crime Commission. The following comments were suggested or offered as issues that should be brought to the attention of the commissions.

- ◆ Same training for Sheriff & Police. Funding for training.
- ◆ All law enforcement officers should come under one retirement plan because some officers have been with state and local governments and due to some irregularity with the system they cannot combine these retirement systems
- ◆ I feel that an officer should not attend BLET until he has a job with a police dept.
- ◆ Officers should have background checks done prior to the school
- ◆ The maturity level of young officers is a great concern. I would like to see the age requirement raised.
- ◆ The close monitoring of applicants to BLET courses for qualification before training. Close monitoring of CJ majors in four year degree programs
- ◆ Open enrollment at community colleges for BLET is a concern of many chiefs
- ◆ Professionalize BLET through Justice Academy or other state agency - evaluate requirements so that we can elevate pay[governing bodies resistant]

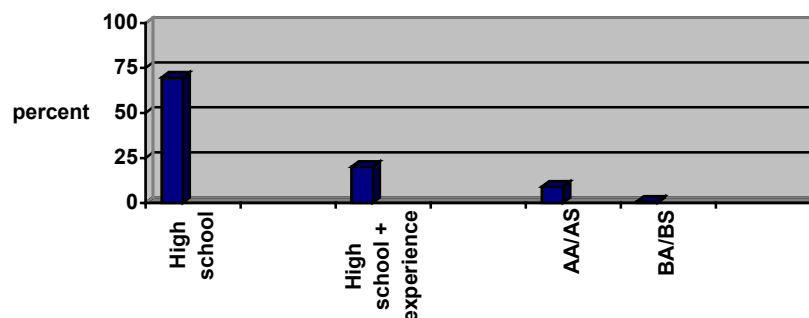
- ◆ All officers employed by various state LE agencies should be compensated on an equitable pay scale
- ◆ I believe BLET candidates should be screened under more stringent standards before being accepted into the program
- ◆ I would like to see more cooperation from BLET directors statewide in allowing on-site recruitment. It seems some BLET directors cater to certain agencies.
- ◆ Look at upgrading to better backgrounds prior to BLET. BLET should not be just a moneymaker for a college.

Agency Educational Requirements and Entry Level Salaries

The final section of the questionnaire included items on agency entry level educational requirements and starting salary; as well as questions regarding the number of police officers who hold a college degree and the relationship between possessing this degree and career advancement.

As Figure 5 depicts 83 (69.7%) agencies reported that a high school degree was the minimum educational requirement for entry into sworn police positions with an additional 24 agencies (20.2%) requiring some degree of work experience in combination with this degree. Eleven police departments (9.2%) required an associates' degree and only one agency required a college diploma in order for the applicants to be considered for entry level employment.

Figure 5 Entry Level Educational Requirement



Entry level salaries varied considerably but tended to cluster between \$21,000 to \$25,000 with 58.7 percent of the respondents identifying this range as being inclusive for their department's starting salary. One-quarter of the agencies reported a starting salary between \$26,000 and \$30,000 with six percent reporting entry level salaries in the \$31,000 to \$35,000 range. Twelve, or 9.9 percent, reported an entry-level salary of less than \$20,000.

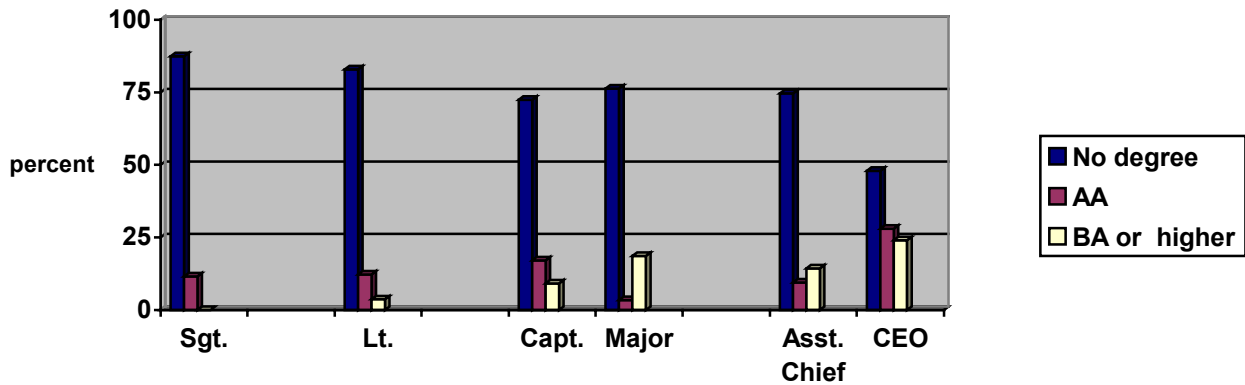
The majority of the police agencies in which an officer returned a survey do offer a higher level of starting pay for prior law enforcement experience (62.1%) with 55.3 percent of the agencies increasing the base salary from one to five percent. Thirty five percent of those agencies which do reward prior experience increased the base salary from six to 15 percent while four percent offered a 16 to 25 percent higher starting salary for officers with prior law enforcement experience. Four agencies (5.3%) reported a salary which was greater than 25 percent of the normal base salary for new hires with prior law enforcement experience.

A smaller number of agencies offered an entry level salary which was pro rated based upon the applicants' educational credentials with 27 departments (21.8%) increasing the base salary for candidates with an AA/AS and 29 agencies (23.4%) increasing the starting pay when the applicant possesses a BA/BS. Fifteen percent of the departments offered higher entry-level salaries for applicants holding an advanced degree such as a MA/MS.

In over 90 percent of the responding agencies applicants possessing an AA/AS and/or a BA/BS received a starting salary which was between one and 10 percent higher than their counterparts who lacked these degrees. A six to 10 percent higher entry level salary for individuals holding an advanced degree was offered by 42 percent of the departments with 31 percent of the agencies increasing the base salary from 11 to 20 percent for candidates with an advanced educational degree.

Figure 6 reveals the percent distribution for those agencies requiring no college degree for promotion versus those agencies which require a formal education beyond high school as a prerequisite for career advancement. Seventy percent or more of the agencies do not require a degree in order for an officer to receive a promotion, irrespective of the position - sergeant to assistant chief. For chiefs, park superintendents and other CEOs, a lesser 48 percent require no degree with 28 percent requiring an AA and 24 percent requiring a BA or higher.

Figure 6 Percent of Agencies Requiring a College Degree for Advancement



One-half of the responding agencies reported that 20 percent or less of their sworn personnel possessed college degrees. Twelve (10 percent of the responding agencies) agencies reported that 21 to 30 percent of their officers held college degrees while another 10 percent of the agencies commented that 41 to 50 percent of their sworn officers graduated from college. Twenty percent of the police departments reported that more than half of their officers held a college degree. Sixteen agencies stated that more than 75 percent of their sworn force held a college degree.

Research Questions

1. Do agencies with high attrition rates differ from agencies with low attrition rates in terms of how each group rates the effectiveness of their recruitment strategies?

No, surprisingly, agency attrition rate has no significant bearing on how the respondents rated the effectiveness of each recruitment strategy. Agencies with low attrition rates are no more likely to report effective recruitment strategies than agencies with higher attrition rates. In other words, for police agencies effective recruitment strategies are not directly related to the extent to which an agency loses sworn personnel.

2. Do agencies with high attrition rates differ from agencies with low attrition rates in terms of how each group rates the effectiveness of their retention strategies?

No, *the effectiveness ratings of the various retention strategies did not vary by agency attrition group. Agencies with low attrition rates are no more*

likely to report more effective retention strategies than agencies with high attrition rates. Thus it appears that the perceived effectiveness of retention techniques is not related to agency turnover.

3. In terms of attrition rates do agencies that adhere to the minimum educational requirement differ from agencies that require an AA/AS or higher?

No, agency attrition rates are not significantly related to minimum educational requirements. Agencies with low and high turnover rates do not differ in terms of their entry level educational requirements. In other words, police officers that hold a high school diploma are no more likely to remain with an agency than officers holding higher educational credentials. Contrary to popular assumptions officers who hold higher educational credentials are not leaving the agency at a higher rate than their counterparts who possess the high school diploma.

4. In terms of entry level salaries do agencies with high attrition rates differ from agencies with low attrition rates?

No, agencies are not losing sworn personnel because of their respective starting salaries. Contrary to popular beliefs starting salary is not currently and directly related to attrition. Agencies with high attrition rates do not have significantly lower entry-level salaries than agencies with lower attrition rates. Consequently, factors other than education and starting salary are driving attrition rates. As noted above, agency budget restrictions were the most commonly reported reasons for attrition. Perhaps officers are either being forced to leave, i.e. budgetary issues force layoffs, or voluntarily leave around the three year employment mark due to the lack of promotional opportunity and an accompanying increase in salaries.

5. Do small and large agencies differ in terms of their perceived effectiveness ratings for recruitment techniques?

Yes, larger police departments are more likely to use, and more likely to report higher effectiveness ratings, for three recruitment techniques – Internet, Police Corps and job fairs. Smaller agencies are less likely to employ these three techniques and do not view them as effective recruitment strategies.

6. Do small and large police agencies differ in their attrition rates?

Yes, larger police agencies report an average attrition rate of 10.2 percent while their smaller counterparts report an attrition rate almost twice as high (18.2%).

7. Are larger agencies more likely to hire applicants who have already completed BLET?

No, both small and large police departments reported similar percentages for the number of new hires who had previously completed a BLET course of instruction. In fact, on the average smaller agencies reported that 84 percent of their new hires had completed BLET versus 82.7 percent of the larger agencies' new employees.

Discussion and Policy Implications/Recommendations

It is extremely important to consider external events and the current economic situation, which both local and state police agencies are experiencing, as a contextual framework when interpreting the results of the current study. The events of 9/11 and the subsequent war on terrorism, the current fiscal crisis and recession as well as the war in Iraq have and will impact recruitment and retention issues among the state's police agencies. Economic concerns and limitations may limit attrition as individual officers have fewer options to pursue outside of their current position, i.e. fewer available jobs for which the officers can apply. Conversely, more positions may be created as a response to homeland security issues and more vacant positions may open up in order to fill the void left by officers who have been activated to serve in the military reserves.

As a result, survey responses indicate that as a general rule police departments are not initiating aggressive recruitment campaigns at this time with slightly less than 10 applicants per sworn position. Also, with the exception of four recruitment techniques, respondents do not rate the effectiveness of the current recruitment strategies extremely high as indicated by an average ranking below midpoint of the given scale.

Recommendation # 1

Police departments may wish to consider launching a more aggressive recruitment strategy to fill vacancies which are fairly limited at this time as indicated by an average vacancy rate of 7.2 percent. New and innovative recruitment strategies should be

explored as well as holding discussions that center on improving the effectiveness of existing strategies. Perhaps, more recruiting efforts should be conducted on a national level which would include recruiting ex-military personnel. This would expand the average number of applicants, which is currently 9.9 per position and possibly include more individuals which the departments view as better and more qualified applicants.

Respondents overwhelmingly mentioned salary issues as factors affecting both recruitment and retention within their agencies. Increasing the average starting salary may attract a better and larger applicant pool, however study findings suggest that the greater salary concern occurs after, and not before, the applicant is hired as a new officer. On the average officers are leaving the department after two years and 10 months of service possibly because of limited opportunities for promotion and/or the failure to receive an increase in their salaries. In other words they are still receiving the same compensation, or only a slight increase above, their original starting salaries. This holds true for all officers irrespective of whether or not they possess a two or four-year college degree.

Recommendation # 2

Further work is needed to explore options for retaining officers beyond the three-year service mark including proposals to address increasing officer salaries during this critical period. In addition to cost of living adjustments, merit pay, increased pay for education and specialized training and in-grade step increases should be considered. Graduated pay scales based on length of service, with or without supplemental state and federal funding were mentioned as possible alternatives. Increasing salaries, during this critical period, would probably be more problematic for the small police departments yet would be more beneficial since these agencies reported significantly higher attrition rates.

It is also postulated that these measures would further reduce statewide turnover rates which remained stable, or dropped slightly for the majority of the surveyed agencies, during the past three years. Nonetheless nearly a quarter of the agencies reported increasing turnover rates during this period and these measures would exert more influence on those agencies which experienced a greater degree of turnover above the average statewide rate of 14 percent.

A relatively large percentage of the respondents noted concerns about the current applicant screening process including the role of the community colleges in screening and BLET instruction. Given the fact that across the state 82 percent of the newly employed sworn officers have already completed BLET, the importance of pre-BLET screening should be apparent.

Recommendation # 3

Serious consideration should be directed at examining current BLET screening procedures and further consideration should be given to exploring options for strengthening and improving the screening process. Numerous recommendations were offered in this area including requiring a mandatory passing score on standardized entrance exams, minimum reading and writing test requirements as well as having all interested parties pass the minimum Training and Standards employment requirements prior to enrolling in a BLET course of instruction.

The three largest reasons which explain officer attrition were identified as agency budget restrictions, accepting employment in the private sector and lateral transfers to other law enforcement agencies. While the first two may be more difficult to address, especially in light of the current economic situation, the issue of lateral transfers is within the domain of training and standards.

Recommendation # 4

A more detailed and in-depth study should be conducted to further assess the issue of lateral transfers within the law enforcement community. Issues such as why officers switch agencies, including questions regarding salaries/ benefits and promotions at a higher rank, should be studied. Officers who leave for employment with state agencies and larger municipal law enforcement agencies should be contrasted with those transferring to agencies of the same size and smaller. Recommendations should be directed at reducing the number of lateral transfers across law enforcement agencies which may include consideration of salary issues, extending an officer's employment contract to three years and a combination of employment restrictions and incentives to remain with an agency once employed.

